

**59**

# **Wacker rehab, Part II, announced**

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The first \$25 million of an estimated \$280 million for the second phase of the Wacker Drive reconstruction in downtown Chicago was announced today.

"This is a very good start," said Mayor Richard Daley, who was joined by U.S. Senators Dick Durbin and Barack Obama at a news conference to announce the federal funding.

Additional federal and state funding must be identified to cover the second phase's total cost, but the mayor said that the city hopes to begin construction in 2007 or 2008.

The Illinois Department of Transportation will have to come up with matching funds before the federal government delivers the \$25 million portion to the city, officials acknowledged. The source of the matching funds has not yet been identified.

The latest construction phase would rebuild the north-south segment of Wacker from Randolph to Congress. Built in its present, double-deck configuration in the 1950s, this section of the street handles an average of 60,000 vehicles every weekday, officials said.

Wacker is a two-level street, with an upper level for local traffic and a lower level for express traffic. The street follows the Chicago River west from Lake Shore Drive, takes a sharp left turn at the northwest corner of the Loop and heads south to Congress Parkway and the Eisenhower Expressway.

**A previous, 21-month reconstruction of the east-west portion of Wacker from Michigan Avenue to Randolph was completed in November 2002. Deteriorating pavement and support columns were replaced, sidewalks and vehicle lanes were widened and traffic signals were upgraded.**

**"That \$200 million project, we should note, was completed on time and within budget," Obama said. "We have no reason to doubt the same will happen with this span of road as well."**

Daley said that the first phase of the Wacker reconstruction "was the best-managed project in the City of Chicago."

Durbin said, "Wacker Drive is one of the greatest streets in the City of Chicago. I'll have to ask the mayor to correct me, but it may be the only street that is north, south, east, west, upper and lower."

The \$25 million for the Wacker project was part of the federal transportation bill recently passed by Congress.

The legislation also provided \$224 million to rebuild the CTA Brown Line, \$140 million to build a western access road to O'Hare International Airport, \$130 million to reconstruct the Douglas Branch of the CTA Blue Line and \$100 million to eliminate bottlenecks in the Chicago-area freight rail system.

The mayor praised federal funding for these and smaller projects around the city.

"All those projects are infrastructure," Daley said. "They rebuild communities in all parts of the city."

Tribune staff reporter Gary Washburn, WGN-Ch. 9 and Tribune wire services contributed to this story.